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**Testimony of the Honorable John D. Dingell**

**House Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration,  
and Related Agencies**

**March 19, 2003**

Chairman Bonilla, Ranking Member Kaptur, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on matters under your jurisdiction. I deeply appreciate the important work of the Subcommittee as you seek to balance the needs and priorities of America's agricultural sector within the fiscal constraints of the budget. It is to this point that I will direct my initial comments.

**House Budget Resolution and Agricultural Spending**

I will begin my testimony by briefly addressing the severe reductions in agricultural spending that will be required if the House Budget Committee's resolution is adopted. If the resolution is adopted, the work of this Subcommittee will be virtually impossible. What this means in real terms is that conservation, nutrition, rural development and producer payment programs would be cut by more than 25 percent over their authorized amounts. These draconian cuts are neither justified nor sustainable.

As you are keenly aware, because of low commodity prices, market concentration, unfair foreign competition, rising costs of inputs and weather disasters, farmers continue to be squeezed in an ever-worsening economic crisis. Congress responded to the crisis in rural America by reauthorizing the farm bill last year, and by providing producers the emergency support they needed to make it through these tough times. We mustn't balance the budget on the backs of agricultural producers.

**Emerald Ash Borer**

The second issue I would like to touch upon is the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a new invasive species that has infested Michigan, Northern Ohio and parts of Canada.

The EAB is an exotic beetle from Asia that was first discovered in July 2002 feeding on ash trees in southeastern Michigan. In February 2003, EAB was confirmed in Lucas County, Ohio, which borders the infested area in Michigan. EAB larvae feed in the phloem and outer sapwood of healthy and distressed trees, producing galleries that girdle and kill branches, eventually destroying entire trees.

Evidence suggests that the pest has been established in Michigan since at least 1997, affecting that State's 700 million ash trees and causing an estimated \$11.6 million in damage to landscape and wood lots in Southeast Michigan over the past 5 years.

In Michigan, EAB is currently limited to six counties: Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, Monroe, and Wayne. APHIS and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) are planning additional surveys for spring 2003, to ensure additional areas are not infested. MDA has quarantined nurseries in the six infested counties to prevent the shipping of ash trees, wood, and logs out of this area.

In response to insect damage found in Windsor, Ontario, Canada (Essex County), the Canadian government is also conducting surveys to delineate the pest's range, and quarantining ash trees and wood.

The Michigan Interagency Invasive Species Task Force - comprised of APHIS, Michigan State University, MDA, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Forest Service, and Michigan Technological University - is gathering information on the pest's biology.

In conjunction with Canadian officials, the Task Force is also developing an eradication management strategy and operational plan based on the recommendations from a science panel with experience in forest pests and area-wide pest programs. Based on the science panel's recommendations, the Task Force intends to implement a zone management strategy with five distinct zones, which will provide for detection, containment, and, ultimately, eradication. Survey, eradication, and tree restoration activities will vary according to zone. Outreach activities in all five zones will focus on educating area residents of risks and regulations associated with quarantined materials.

APHIS and the Ohio Department of Agriculture are delimiting the extent of the infestation and discussing an appropriate course of action. Ohio officials are currently consulting with APHIS and the Forest Service to develop a response to the confirmation.

To prevent this current crisis from spreading, the Michigan Department of Agriculture, beginning September 5, 2002, quarantined all Ash trees in the six infected counties. Since that time, one half of a million of the total 28 million ash trees in these counties have been destroyed.

The current outbreak mirrors the Dutch Elm epidemic that completely eradicated the American Elm population 50 years ago. To prevent a similar catastrophe among our Ash resources, we must act now and bring all necessary USDA resources to bear on this emergency.

Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm has requested all necessary financial and technical assistance from the USDA to maximize success of the quarantine prior to the re-emergence of the pest this spring. State estimates from the Michigan Department of Agriculture project that the most immediate mitigation activities will require \$17 million this year. While early projections show that control and eradication costs may reach \$179 million over five years, these costs will grow exponentially for governmental units and property owners across several states in the absence of swift and decisive federal assistance. The continued destruction of these trees is a problem for

Michigan, our country and our continent. Without swift and sure action, and full and fair financial assistance, the entire ash population may be lost.

For myself, and on behalf of the entire Michigan congressional delegation, I respectfully request that the Subcommittee bring all necessary resources to bear on the eradication of the Emerald Ash Borer. I would also ask that in considering this request, you provide as much flexibility as possible to the State of Michigan in meeting any state matching requirements.

### **Farm Service Agency**

With regard to the Farm Service Agency, I have heard from my constituent farmers that staffing levels at the Farm Service Agency county offices are inadequate. Producers have been forced to wait for many weeks and months for appointments and payments because staffing levels are insufficient. Indeed, I have recently received a report that only 19 percent of the farms in Monroe County, Michigan have updated their base acres and yields as allowed by the new farm bill. I have been informed that the backlog is due to the burdensome paperwork requirements of the new farm bill coupled with understaffing at FSA offices. I would urge the subcommittee to assure that staffing levels are adequate and appropriate for the delivery of services to producers at FSA county offices throughout the country.

### **Conservation Spending**

As you know, I was a strong proponent of increasing conservation spending in the farm bill. And while the enacted law did not authorize as much conservation spending as I would have liked, it is an accurate statement that this was by far the “greenest” farm bill in history. The legislation added several new conservation programs and it dramatically increased funding for conservation through the Commodity Credit Corporation, more than 80 percent over current levels. I would urge the Subcommittee in the strongest possible terms to fully fund the conservation programs that were authorized in the new farm bill.

I would direct the Subcommittee’s attention to one important conservation program in particular – the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). The original intent of congress was for WRP to be funded at 250,000 acres per year for five years. However, the President’s budget request asks for 200,000 acres per year for six years. I would ask the Subcommittee to ensure that Congressional intent in this area is followed, and that the acreage cap is maintained at 250,000 per year.

### **Individual Projects**

#### **Advanced Decision Support System for Agriculture Conservation Programs**

As the Subcommittee is aware, there is great interest in Washington – as well as in the field – for using advanced information and decision support technologies to evaluate current USDA-funded conservation programs and to make existing and future programs more effective and cost efficient. Altarum, a nonprofit, information research and innovation institution in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has proposed a study and technology pilot that will demonstrate an integrated technology tool (GIS-based) to evaluate current and future conservation programs aimed at enhancing the water quality in

the Great Lakes. Once demonstrated in the Great Lakes region, this support tool can be scaled to support similar requirements in other regions of the country.

Last year, the conference agreement recognized the importance of this project and allocated \$500,000 for this project. The total cost of project is anticipated at \$2.0 million. \$1.5 million in fiscal year 2004 from the US Department of Agriculture is needed to initiate the demonstration phase of this project. It is anticipated that this funding will result in the development and implementation of Advanced Decision Support System for Agriculture Conservation Programs that will be piloted in the Great Lakes region.

I would respectfully request that the subcommittee consider a \$1.5 million appropriation in the Natural Resources Conservation Service budget for FY04 to supplement the FY03 funding.

#### **Eradication of Bacterial Contamination in the U.S. Egg Supply**

The total U.S. production of shell eggs each year exceeds 50 billion. Of these, an estimated 2.5 million are contaminated with Salmonella Enteritidis bacteria, causing an estimated 1.4 million illnesses and an average 100 deaths each year. This health threatening issue is so critical that the FDA has mandated a warning statement on all shell egg cartons, which states: 'To prevent illness from bacteria: Keep eggs refrigerated, cook until yolks are firm, and cook foods containing eggs thoroughly.'

A non-profit constituent institution of mine, the Michigan Technology Commercialization Corporation, has proposed a project to develop a high volume cost efficient system for the pasteurization of shell eggs. The project will be based on a patented technology incorporating microwave and thermal pasteurization techniques. The basic proof of principal of this technique has been completed successfully. The project will demonstrate that these pasteurization techniques are efficacious in high volume applications, capable of meeting the needs of the U.S. egg production industry. Furthermore, it is my understanding that the solution can ultimately be retrofitted into existing production lines ensuring safety for the entire U.S. shell egg supply.

I respectfully request that the Subcommittee consider funding this research at in the amount of \$1.1 million to further develop this pasteurization technology. This funding will be utilized to validate the process and efficacy of the technique of combining microwave and thermal technologies for the pasteurization of shell eggs in high volume applications. Michigan Technology Commercialization Corporation will work with leading institutions and suppliers to the egg production industry to ensure this technology can solve this issue on a nation wide basis.

The Michigan Technology Commercialization Corporation is a not-for-profit research and development institute which focuses on maximizing the value of agricultural technologies to assist U.S. food producers while ensuring the safety of the nations food supply.

#### **Diagnostic Center for Population and Animal Health (DCPAH)**

A new state of the art Level III human and animal health laboratory is scheduled to open on the campus of Michigan State University in February of 2004. The Diagnostic Center for Population

and Animal Health (DCPAH) will be a national leader in detecting human and animal diseases, including Bovine TB and Chronic Wasting Disease, which are infecting animal populations in Michigan and throughout the nation.

The State of Michigan has invested more than \$58 million in construction and development of this new state of the art facility. What is still lacking is operation funds to operate this testing laboratory.

Given that DCPAH will be on the front line for detecting foreign animal diseases and other exotic and emerging diseases, I would urge the Subcommittee to consider granting \$500,000 for the operations of the lab in FY04 APHIS budget.

**Support of natural food products that enhance sleep patterns and health in older Americans**

I respectfully request \$2.5 Million be provided in the FY2004 Agriculture Appropriations Bill and Report in the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), Federal Administration Account for Eastern Michigan University to support development of natural food products that enhance sleep patterns, cognitive function and overall health in older Americans.

Eastern Michigan University seeks funding to utilize whole food products, such as soybeans, cherries and blueberries, which are produced in Michigan, to develop nutraceutical products to contribute to the health of older Americans. This objective will be achieved through basic research and human trials, and will ultimately lead to effective nutraceutical product development. Specifically, Eastern Michigan will: (1) investigate the effectiveness of melatonin and its precursor amino acids for short-term enhancement of normalized sleep patterns and improved cognitive function in young and elderly individuals. The sleep promoting characteristics of melatonin and will be tested initially in healthy college-aged volunteers. Follow-up trials will be conducted in elderly individuals housed at a local retirement community that has agreed to participate in studies; and (2) investigate the effectiveness of compounds such as melatonin, arginine, glutamine and S-adenosylmethionine (SAME) with regard to stress reduction, enhanced immune function and indicators of long-term health. Melatonin possesses anti-oxidant properties as well as sleep promotion characteristics.

Michigan is a leading producer of agricultural products such as cherries, blueberries and soybeans. Each of these products has been shown, individually, to possess nutraceutical components such as melatonin, isoflavones, amino acids and antioxidants. Additionally, the cottonseed has been shown to possess high levels of melatonin and antioxidants. These whole food products will be utilized as raw materials to develop nutraceutical products intended to improve sleep patterns and overall health in the diverse population and older Americans. The development of such products will not only benefit the health of Michigan residents, and Americans in general, but it also will provide additional marketing opportunities for Michigan agricultural crops.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Kaptur and Members of the Subcommittee for your time and attention. I appreciate the difficult work that lies ahead for this panel and I thank you all for your commitment to American agriculture. I hope you will consider the recommendations I have laid out to you in my testimony and that you will act on them. Thank you again.